

ORIGINAL

BEFORE THE
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, DC

In the Matter of:

Amendment of Sections 74.1231) DA 98-2527
74.1232, 74.1233, 74.1284 of the)
Commission's Rules) RM-9419

To: Mass Media Bureau

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

**STATION WILL(AM) STATEMENT IN PARTIAL SUPPORT
OF ACAMBA PETITION FOR RULEMAKING**

The University of Illinois Board of Trustees, licensee of noncommercial educational Standard Radio Station WILL(AM), 580 kHz, Urbana, Illinois (hereinafter "University of Illinois"), supports, in part, the Petition for Rulemaking filed by American Community AM Broadcasters Association ("ACAMBA") proposing that AM licensees be allowed to obtain licenses for FM translators and be permitted to use FM translators to retransmit AM station signals for purposes of fill-in service.

The University of Illinois believes that use of FM translators by certain qualified AM licensees would serve the public interest by providing improved night-time coverage, as ACAMBA proposes. The University is in full agreement with ACAMBA that a rule change permitting "cross-service" FM translators for AM stations is long overdue, given the technical limitations of AM broadcasting. However, Station WILL(AM) believes that the ACAMBA proposal should be modified in certain key respects, so that the FM translators could be used to provide service to AM directional antenna nulls and so that Station WILL(AM) and other noncommercial educational AM radio stations could benefit from the proposed rule changes, as explained below.

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Station WILL(AM) is one of AM broadcasting's pioneer stations. Station WILL(AM) began broadcasting in 1922 using the call letters "WRM" and operates presently with 5,000 watts daytime power, but with a night-time post-sunset operation of only 100 watts. Station WILL(AM) also operates with a directional pattern that protects another co-channel AM station licensed to a community that is three states away from Station WILL(AM)'s transmitter site. Because of this required protection, Station WILL(AM) has a directional antenna null in its signal coverage. The null covers Decatur, Illinois (population 83,900), as well as surrounding areas. Thus, Decatur -- which is approximately 50 miles away from Station WILL(AM) -- receives virtually no daytime coverage and no night-time coverage at all from Station WILL(AM). Station WILL(AM) is a noncommercial educational AM station that carries national programming from National Public Radio (NPR) and Public Radio International (PRI), including *Morning Edition*, *All Things Considered*, *Fresh Aire*, *A Prairie Home Companion*, and *BBC*, as well as local and regional news and information programming.

Therefore, while the University of Illinois believes that the ACAMBA proposal has merit and that the Commission should issue a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking regarding FM translators for AM Stations, it also believes that the ACAMBA proposal must be modified to expand the scope of AM licensees that may benefit from any FM translator rule changes on "cross-service" translating.

For example, the University of Illinois suggests that all noncommercial educational AM radio stations be eligible to use FM translator stations to fill-in service gaps from nighttime coverage limitations or from directional antenna nulls, regardless of "stand-alone" status or power limitations. Noncommercial educational AM radio stations are akin to "stand-alone" AM

operations, in that public radio stations are community-oriented, community-supported, and not part of large, national, radio group ownership chains. The University of Illinois estimates that approximately 20 AM stations throughout the country are licensed as noncommercial educational stations. Thus, the impact of including all noncommercial educational AM stations is minimal.

Additionally, the University of Illinois suggests that noncommercial educational AM stations, at least, be permitted to use FM translators to fill- in coverage gaps from directional antenna nulls.^{1/} For technical reasons, co- and adjacent-channel AM stations are afforded interference protection that can stretch many, many miles away from their legitimate service areas. While necessary, this interference protection often precludes directional AM stations from serving areas and populations that could reasonably expect service from them. The Decatur, Illinois situation described above is an example. In 1990, when the Commission last addressed the issue of cross-service translating, it suggested that groundwave propagation characteristics of AM broadcasting did not generally support a need for "fill-in" service, but that "licensees may desire to supplement coverage in directional antenna nulls." *Amendment of Part 74 of the Commission's Rules Concerning FM Translator Stations*, 5 FCC Rcd 7212 at paragraph 89 (1990). The University of Illinois believes that the proposed FM translator rule changes provide an ideal vehicle to address the problem of service in AM directional antenna nulls.

^{1/} The University of Illinois does not endorse the use of FM translator stations to extend AM service beyond what is reasonable -- limiting an AM station's ability to use FM translator stations to the theoretical omnidirectional coverage pattern of AM station may be necessary to preclude abuses.

Alternatively, should the Commission determine that the FM translator rules should not be modified, Station WILL(AM) asks that the Commission articulate a limited waiver policy for its FM translator rules that would permit "cross-service" translators for certain AM radio stations, such as noncommercial educational AM Radio Stations like Station WILL(AM) that seek to "fill-in" coverage gaps in nighttime service or to directional antenna null areas, to obtain a rule waiver. ACAMBA's reference to prior waivers granted by the Commission for AM stations to use FM translators or boosters suggests that articulation of a waiver policy standard is necessary and appropriate.

For the reasons set forth above, the University of Illinois supports, in part, the proposal of ACAMBA and requests that it be modified to that the University of Illinois' Station WILL(AM), and other noncommercial educational AM radio stations, may benefit from the FM translator rule changes that would permit AM cross-service translating. The University of Illinois believes the public interest would be served by such changes in the FM translator rules.

Respectfully submitted,

THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS BOARD OF REGENTS

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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I certify that a copy of the foregoing "Station WILL(AM) Statement in Partial Support Of ACAMBA Petition for Rulemaking" was served this 11th day of January, 1999 by hand delivery or first class United States mail, postage prepaid, upon the following:

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